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STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

END OF YEAR REPORT
1993-1994

ALLYSON BOWEN
CHAIRPERSON

MASSACHUSETTS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
1993-1994 END OF YEAR REPORT

Background

The Student Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Board of Education was established by Chapter 1009 of the Acts of 1971. The Student Advisory Council is comprised of eleven regional student advisory councils and one state student advisory council. Each high school student body in the Commonwealth elects two delegates to one of the eleven regional councils, which are then collapsed into five operating councils. The eleven regional councils, in turn, elect four delegates to the State Student Advisory Council. The state council elects three officers: a secretary, vice-chairperson, and a chairperson who serves as a voting member of the Board of Education, representing the council and the secondary school students of the Commonwealth. Department of Education staff provide technical assistance to this six hundred member Student Advisory Council.

The Student Advisory Council has been an effective body in advocating for increased student involvement in the decision making process of schools. Since its inception, the Council has accomplished the following:

- Increased student representation in decision-making through sponsoring enacted legislation which: (a) created Handbook Review Committees; (b) created the Student Advisory Committees to School Committees (SAC to SC); (c) established the chair of the SAC to SC as an ex-officio member of the School Committee; (d) included student representation on school improvement councils; (e) provided a process for students and parents to create high school courses; and (f) established the opportunity for school committees to adopt student rights provisions.

- Advocated for student rights through developing and updating the publication, "Check It Out: A Student's Guide to Rights and Responsibilities," and training thousands of students on their rights and how to responsibly organize for them.

- Increased student voice on a wide range of educational affairs through representation on Department advisory boards and committees.

- Lobbied for quality public education through providing testimony at legislative hearings, educating students on budget issues, and organizing students at the state level and in local schools.

OVERVIEW OF THE 1993-1994 YEAR

Throughout the past year, the State Student Advisory Council has strived to achieve a greater sense of awareness of and education on the issues of HIV/AIDS, violence prevention, racism, sexism and homophobia through conferences, legislation and print. This report is a summary of the activities of the Council members who volunteered to raise student awareness throughout Massachusetts.

The Council applauds the dedicated efforts of the Board of Education, the Commission on the Common Core of Learning, the Commission on Time and Learning, and all those involved in improving the educational environment for the students of the Commonwealth. The relentless efforts of these people will allow all students to reach new and impressive heights.

OVERALL SSAC GOALS

The primary goal of this year's State Student Advisory Council was to raise the awareness level of students on issues that impact on their daily lives such as HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, discrimination based on sexual orientation and violence. To address these issues, the School Programs/Student Rights and Social Issues task forces developed conferences and written tools to provide practical and useful information for all students.

The second goal of the SSAC was to further student understanding of how the democratic process operates. Through the Legislative Task Force, student lobbying and perseverance led the to the passage of the SSAC sponsored bill to prohibit discrimination against students based upon sexual orientation.

Our final goal was to increase communication both within the Council and between the Council and all high school students of the Commonwealth. This goal was achieved through both the Media Relations and Regional Chairpersons Task Forces. Media Relations was successful in producing and distributing creative and informative issues of Palatyi, the SSAC newsletter. The Regional Chairpersons contributed to our communications efforts by reaching out to high schools not represented on the Council.

The Executive Task Force has worked to maintain communication throughout the Council while assisting in project initiatives. The entire State Student Advisory Council has worked relentlessly to achieve these goals, and now, at the close of the year, feels that they have been successful. In the following individual Task Force reports, the effective actions used to achieve these goals will be fully described.

LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE

The Legislative Task Force celebrated the passage of HB3353 An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Public Schools on the Basis of Sexual Orientation. We also continued to sponsor legislation and lobbied for other legislation that impacted the students of Massachusetts. These pieces of legislation encompass AIDS/HIV prevention education, student representation on school councils and school committees, prohibiting academic punishment, and improving student-teacher communication.

Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation

This year the Student Advisory Council was successful in passing House Bill 3353 - An act to prohibit discrimination against students in public schools on the basis of sexual orientation. We originally filed this amendment to Chapter 622 in 1990. The State Student Advisory Council worked long and hard lobbying for this bill, attending a rally, and holding a press conference in favor of getting the bill passed. On December 10, 1993 the bill was signed into law and put into effect on March 10, 1994. This makes Massachusetts the only state that has a law to protect public school students from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. SSAC is eager to be involved in educating school on how the law is to be interpreted. We are proud to be part of this historical movement for justice.

AIDS/HIV

House Bill 4098 - An act to include AIDS/HIV prevention education in the health education curriculum of the public schools. This bill, currently in the Education Committee, is a proposal to amend Chapter 71, Sec. 1 to include AIDS/HIV prevention education as a recommended topic in the teaching of health education. The Legislative Task Force will continue to lobby strongly for the passage of this bill.

Academic Punishment

House Bill 1445 - An act to prohibit the use of academic punishment in public schools. This bill is currently in the Education Committee. Academic punishment puts teens at risk, because it is practiced in at least 60% of the state's secondary schools. Students feel no motivation and no further reasons to attend school when their grades are lowered because of academic punishment. Students who are legitimately absent more than the allotted number of days often feel the impact of academic punishment. These students may represent pregnant and/or parenting teens, teens who are ill and cannot receive doctors notes because they cannot afford a doctor, and working student who may have family responsibilities. Supportive measures need to replace academic punishment in order to encourage students to remain in school.

School Committee

House Bill 3370 - An act allowing for voting student representation on school committees. This bill is currently in study. This bill would allow school committees the option of voting favorably to allow student

representation and voting rights as a member of that local school committee. Currently students have non-voting status as school committee members. This bill would expand the role of student representation to equal status with other school committee members. The legislation correlates with the new Educational Reform Law that has greatly affected the roles of school committees. It is important to remember that school committees no longer hire and fire teachers, only the superintendent. The bill is sponsored by Mark Roosevelt. In 1992-93 it made it to first reading in the Senate after passing the House.

Student-Teacher Confidentiality

House Bill 2204 - An act to improve student/teacher communication by providing that certain information between students and school personnel be confidential. This year the State Student Advisory Council's legislative task force continued its work on passing this bill. This bill is currently in the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the task force continues to actively lobby for its passage. If H.2204 passes, students would have a supportive adult to turn to in a time of turmoil rather than relying on peer advice or inaccurate information. It would eliminate the burden of worrying about whether or not communication would be kept confidential. Faculty members would be more capable of fulfilling students needs if they were aware of these protection. This bill would provide faculty and students with a better sense of security and would improve student/teacher relationships.

School Councils in Secondary Schools.

House Bill 2415 - An act to expand student representation on school councils in secondary schools. This bill would amend section 59C of Chapter 71 of the general laws, to achieve parity of professional personnel and parents with student representatives on high school councils. Prior to the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1993, state law mandated a 3-3-3 parity between students, staff, and parents on high school handbook review committees. Now school councils have made the handbook review committee obsolete and students are virtually non existent in policy making decisions in high school. This bill is still in its first year with a lot of potential, and is sponsored by Rep. Paul Casey of Winchester.

MEDIA RELATIONS TASK FORCE

This past year the Media Relations Task Force produced two issues of our newsletter, Palatyi, and we have laid the groundwork for a possible third issue to be released in the fall. We increased the number of issues sent to each school with copies sent to the Student Council, Student Newspaper Editors and the respective advisors for these groups, while continuing to send copies to the Principal and Librarian of all high schools in the Commonwealth. In addition, the issues were longer than past issues. A new venture for Palatyi was the inclusion of articles written in foreign languages such as French and Spanish. The feedback that we received was unprecedented despite the fact we were only able to distribute two issues.

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We established an editorial board consisting of representatives from the Department of Education, Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Teachers Association and the Massachusetts Civil Liberties Union. Their recommendations proved to be valuable. A few of those were to include more information on student rights and how students exercise those rights and explore the possibility of putting Palatyi on Internet making it accessible to more students as well as providing for interaction "on-line".

We did, however, run into some obstacles during the course of the year. Low turnout at several Council meetings and its impact on our ability to meet established deadlines was a major problem this year. Not sending articles to the editor within those deadlines and a lack of student produced graphics also proved to be problems.

We recommend the following to the 1994-95 Media Relation Task Force:

- Work with the Media Relations Director for the Department of Education to publicize the SAC and its events
- Follow through on proposal to put Palatyi on Internet
- Stick to deadlines for articles
- Write articles publicizing the work of the entire Council -- State & Regional
- Try to include student produced graphics

REGIONAL CHAIRPERSONS TASK FORCE

This year, the Regional Chairpersons Task Force established the goals of increasing student involvement in SAC, conducting well organized meetings and providing students with useful information. We are proud of our efforts in contacting non-participating schools to encourage student involvement in SAC. Many meetings across the state brought the attention of SAC to new and interested students. The meetings provided opportunities for students to discuss issues of concern such as discrimination, the varying aspects of Education Reform and education law protecting student rights. The meetings allowed students the chance to share their experiences in successfully resolving issues in their schools and communities. We had hoped to meet monthly along with the State Council, but that was not always possible. We recommend that next year's Regional Chairs continue to provide well organized, meaningful meetings for each regional council. We strongly urge the Regional Chairs to attend all State Council meetings to keep abreast of educational issues and especially to work together to share resources in providing the best Regional Council meetings possible.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS/STUDENT RIGHTS TASK FORCE

This year, the School Programs/Student Rights Task Force held a conference addressing students rights. The conference was May 8th, at Wellesley High School from 9am-12pm. For this conference we invited speakers to discuss the many different issues regarding students rights. Among the speakers were: Allyson Bowen, Chairperson of the State Student Advisory Council; Alan Safran, Department of Education Media Relations Office; David Driscoll, Deputy Commissioner; Ginny Ehrlich, Liaison/Trainer, Learning Support Services, Department of Education; and Mary Bonauto, Gay Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD). Members of the School Program/Students Rights Task Force attended the conference and served on a panel for questions and answers regarding student rights.

We touched upon many issues concerning students such as, violence in schools, harassment, teacher tenure, and media relations within schools. The main topic of discussion was the rights of students. We strongly stressed how very important it is to make our voices heard. Throughout the conference there were many comments and questions which were satisfactorily answered. The conference was taped to provide a resource to students. We have made arrangements with the Department of Education to review the taping of the conference. We recommend that next year's Council follow through on the editing and finalization of the video. In addition, we also recommend to next year's Council that an educational component which compliments the video be developed along with a distribution plan to reach and educate all high school students in the Commonwealth.

SOCIAL ISSUES TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

During the 1993-1994 school year, we, the Social Issues Task Force, helped empower youth to prevent HIV and violence. We hope that our work on these two issues helped high school students in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

First Aids Survival Kits

We, the Social Issues Tasks Force, reached all of the areas of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with our First AIDS Survival Kits. The Social Issues Tasks Force helped Harvard Community Health Plan put these Kits together. Twenty Kits were made available to every high school in the state. The Kits give young people the opportunity to be educated about HIV/AIDS, eliminate myths, and teach people how to be safe. The Kits contain a variety of information about sex, HIV, AIDS, other Sexuality Transmitted Infections, and especially, risk reduction strategies. Hopefully, these Kits will be used in schools and the high rates of Sexuality Transmitted Infections and unplanned pregnancies among teenagers will be reduced.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION CONFERENCE

Violence is one of the biggest problems in school today. It is still on the rise. Our student-run conference, STOP AND THINK, TAKE A STAND ON VIOLENCE, which was held on March 18, 1994, included a skit, a keynote speaker, Barbara Hildt, many workshops, and a storyteller, Derek Burrows. The workshops included role playing, videos, speeches and discussions. Workshop topics included media and violence; weapons, drugs, alcohol and violence; urban violence; dating violence; gay/lesbian/bisexual youth and violence; isms and violence; and conflict resolution. The workshops were run by members of the Social Issues Task Force. The conference, was attended by over one hundred high school students from all over the state and over thirty adults, including teacher and police officers. We were able to educate young people about the causes of violence and prevention for the future.

The Social Issues Tasks Force accomplished both goals that we had hoped to during this school year. The Social Issues Tasks Force focused on the two issues that we thing impact teenagers the most. We hope that the First AIDS Survival Kits and the Violence Prevention Conference help begin changes throughout the state.